



Food That's In . . . When School Is Out!

Summer Food Service Program for Children

Working with the News Media for SFSP

Using the media can be a very effective means of marketing your Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), but it does take some advance planning. A press release, a public service announcement, or even a simple phone call to the news media can let your community know about your Program.

Surveys indicate that most parents are not aware of SFSP sites in their neighborhood. Media coverage can make families with low-income children aware of your Program so they can attend if they are interested. Higher attendance can improve the nutritional status of the neighborhood's children during the summer when they don't have access to regular school meals, while strengthening your SFSP.



General tips

There are various media strategies you, the sponsor, can use to get a message into the news media.

- Keep any announcement about your Program short, simple, and upbeat. Don't use jargon, acronyms, technical terms. Include the name, address, and phone number of a person who can serve as a contact for more information. Many editors will request something in writing, even if you call them.
- Have a kick-off event, inviting a local celebrity and the media. Have the mayor, or a local TV or sports celebrity come to your site, hand out meals, and talk to the kids.
- If your city is served by a news wire service like Associated Press, United Press International, or Reuter, ask them to include your event in their daily listing of news events, known as the daybook. Wire services are located mostly in larger cities.
- Appear on a radio or television public affairs program to talk about summer options for kids. This is best done in late May and June.
- Insert notices in community bulletins and newsletters – churches, community service groups, civil rights and minority organizations, children's organizations, etc.
- Focus on local, community-based media. Smaller, locally-based media are more likely to cover community events.
- Contact reporters who cover children, education issues, or community issues. If a station has a "Kids First" or similar campaign, get in touch with the reporter who does most of those stories, or with the station's public service director.
- Allow four weeks to get a message in print, on the radio, or even on television.
- In any interview or written statement, state the most important fact at the beginning. Talk about your Program, what it is, what it does for kids, and how they can participate. The history that led to the establishment of your program can come later – if you are asked.



- Emphasize the public's interest: SFSP is a program to ensure that kids get a nutritious lunch during their school vacations. Your organization's interests are secondary.

Radio and TV

Most stations accept written public service announcements. It's best to keep these short, giving a phone number where people can call for more information. The announcement should include days of the week that the Program operates, and mention starting and ending dates.

You should ask local stations to broadcast daily menus, especially when meal counts go down. Have participating children come up with an announcement, or record an interview with them that can be used as an announcement.

You should not call at deadline time. Most TV and radio newsrooms are busiest in the hour or two before their news broadcasts.

Newspapers

Sponsors should contact the "community calendar" editor at your local paper. This section lets readers know of activities they may want to attend. Sometimes the paper will run a slightly larger notice on the calendar page – ask them to do this with your notice. You should be aware that the calendar editor often wants four to six weeks' advance notice, so get your information to them as soon as possible.

Calling the newspaper at deadline time is a bad move. It is very likely too late to include your item. Reporters will be very busy and probably will resent your call. Most daily papers are busiest late in the day.

Media training

Sponsors should consider arranging to get at least some training in dealing with the news media. This training can pay great benefits in positive publicity for the program, which in turn can lead to Program growth, which in turn can lead to still greater opportunities for publicity and more Program growth.

Who to call for help

Sponsors who would like assistance in dealing with the media can call:

State Public Affairs Offices

Food and Nutrition Service Regional Offices:

- Western Regional Office, San Francisco
415-705-1311
- Southwest Regional Office, Dallas
214-290-9802
- Mountain Plains Regional Office, Denver
303-844-0312
- Midwest Regional Office, Chicago
312-353-1044
- Southeast Regional Office, Atlanta
404-562-1812
- Mid-Atlantic Regional Office, Robbinsville, New Jersey
609-259-5091
- Northeast Regional Office, Boston
617-565-6395

FNS Headquarters, Alexandria, Virginia:

- Johanna Ramos – 703-305-2039
- Darlene Barnes – 703-305-2286
- Phil Shanholtzer – 703-305-2286

